

Innovations in Citizen Notification & Engagement

CITY OF SCOTTSDALE, ARIZONA



Presented by:

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57,000 Notices sent in 2003
400 Separate Mailings

Traditional Notices

- \$67,000
- 1,200 hours
- Dissatisfied Citizens

Postcards

- \$15,500
- 100 hours
- Increased Citizen Involvement

Most municipalities are trying to do more with less, including improved customer service through notification and involvement efforts. The City of Scottsdale has found a way! We have embraced innovation by switching to postcard notifications, enhancing our notification policy and providing extensive on-line resources. The results of a concentrated effort to enhance citizen notification and involvement are simple, yet profound:

- Greater community awareness of planning and development processes
- Cost savings and costs avoided
- Increased automation allows for more timely notifications
- Increased citizen participation at public meetings and hearings

Quick Facts About Scottsdale

Slogan: "The West's Most Western Town"

Population: 218,000

Size: 184.5 sq miles, 31 miles north to south

Density: 1,109 people per square mile;
2.22 persons per household

Median age: 42.1 years

Median household income: \$62,000

Size rank: 5th largest city in Arizona

Education level: 42% college graduates,
28% some college, and 20% are high school graduates

Annual Visitors: 7.2 million (1999)

Annual Budget: \$335 million.

Employees: 2,100 Full Time Employees

It is the mission of the City of Scottsdale to build citizen trust by practicing open, accountable, and responsive government and provide quality services.

To ensure more effective community awareness and involvement, the city approached notification with a dual goal:

- a) To communicate more clearly and directly, using layman's language to encourage participation/awareness; and
- b) To simplify and reduce the time/cost involved with preparing community notices.

The City of Scottsdale has created a unique, comprehensive enhanced Citizen Notification & Involvement program to accomplish these goals. This presentation focuses on three main aspects of the ENI Program.

Postcards:

While results of the city's annual communication survey indicate that direct mail is the most effective way to reach residents, there was a concern that the technical nature of the public hearing notices did little to encourage residents to understand the city's development process or to provide input. The transition from "old-fashioned" letter mailers to postcards sent via the U.S. Post Office's Mail On-Line feature allowed for clear, concise, "user-friendly" communication with property owners affected by proposed development. Switching to a postcard notification makes sense – save money, save time, increase effectiveness.

Enhanced Notification Policy:

The cost savings from Scottsdale's transition to postcards (from \$1.22 to 26¢ per mailer) was rolled back into the system, allowing for the expansion of our notification efforts. The program was also expanded to include Development Review Board Cases and "Keeping You Informed" postcards, which are sent for ALL public hearing case. Scottsdale now mails out 60,000 notices annually (Planning Commission, City Council, Development Review Board & Board of Adjustment cases).

Extensive On-Line Resources:

In the past two years the City has redesigned its web site, added new resources, and implemented methods to share comprehensive project information with citizens. The single largest change, and most dramatic impact, has been with the Case Fact Sheets (www.scottsdaleaz.gov/cases). On a single page, the staff, applicants and interested citizens can track a case from submittal through the public hearing process. A project summary posted within 48-hrs of formal application submittal, application materials and staff reports are uploaded for viewing, hearing dates and documents are all accessed through a single point of access for each case. Additional information, links to related cases and web sites can also be added to maximize the effectiveness.

Such a strong emphasis on citizen education and outreach, across the entire organization, has had significant results. The effort has spawned innovative programs, subscriptions, and publications throughout the organization; the result is a comprehensive, city-wide citizen outreach effort that has garnered Scottsdale several awards, both regional and national, as well as the accolades of our customers. Letting the community know of projects early in the

review/approval process has allowed citizens to become partners in the process, helping to shape the way their neighborhood grows and matures.

Our Enhanced Citizen Notification & Involvement Program is constantly updating, enhancing, and expanding.

- On-line case fact sheets are constantly being revised to provide additional information
- Development of case tracking sheets that monitor key milestones, (i.e. site posting, postcard mailing, legal ads, etc.) are all done consistently and accurately for all projects
- Inclusion of contacts file in on-line case folder to document calls for more information – this list is used to inform stakeholders about public involvement opportunities and shared with the developer/applicant so they can provide follow-up information.
- Refinements to site posting signs to make sure they are easy to read and re-usable.
- A Departmental-wide effort to document processes and procedures for customer education and internal consistency, including a comprehensive re-write of the Citizen's Development Guide.

The City of Scottsdale is excited about the opportunity to share with other communities what we have learned. Please call our Community Resource Center at (480) 312-7800 for more information on how to incorporate this program into your municipality's citizen notification and involvement efforts.